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## Let Them Play!

Daniel Drashinsky  
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Let Them Play!

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors  
Spring 2017

Honors Capstone Project in Your Major

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**Abstract**

This auto-ethnographical research narrative examines the similarities and differences of physical activity and recreation settings for youth in inner-city and suburban communities. The narrative starts analyzing the role of recreation and physical activity in a community setting through the work of recreation and physical activity professionals. This includes a review of the components that make a successful recreation program for a community. Through interviews of recreation professionals, the narrative looks into the experiences of the recreation departments of a suburban and inner city community. The narrative then explores the experiences of young people as well as myself in these recreation settings. Ultimately, the goal of the research is to see if suburban and urban youth receive the same opportunities and resources to stay active and live healthy lives, as well as participate in recreation activities.

**Executive Summary**

Growing up in a small suburban town in Central New Jersey, I was always encouraged to live a healthy, active lifestyle. From learning about wellness in school health class, to participating in a variety of community youth sport programs, personal care was avidly promoted. The town had many recreational facilities and open spaces for exercise and play. As a health and physical education major at Syracuse, I have realized how much the community can play a role in the health and wellness of the people who live there. A place must have adequate space, resources, and initiatives to keep people living active and healthy lives. Since I have lived in the suburbs all of my life, I have become interested in how people who live in inner-cities stay active and maintain a healthy lifestyle, despite the lack of space and resources available. I will examine two communities in Central New Jersey, my hometown suburb of Marlboro, New Jersey and a urban town, Freehold Borough, NJ just a couple of miles up the road. I will be examining the community in the areas of recreation, available resources, and community programs that promote physical activity, I want to see how one can promote physical activity in areas of limited space and massive populations. I strongly believe that any individual can live a healthy and active lifestyle regardless of the disadvantages that may occur.

This project looked at many different aspects with regards to youth recreation and physical activity in both the communities of Freehold Borough and Marlboro. I first defined and discussed concepts that are essential to a successful youth recreation program such as the facilities, organization and promotion of recreation programs. In addition to defining these terms, I discuss other terms that were crucial to a person's understanding of the study such as recreation, physical activity, leisure, suburban, and urban. These terms are very broad, so defining them will give the reader an understanding of their meaning throughout the project. The terms were helpful when doing research on the physical activity and recreation programs of the two communities, as I was able to look for specific information.

Using the terms and definitions from the beginning, I researched the youth recreation and physical activity programs in both Marlboro and Freehold Borough. I looked at their office websites, however, I needed detailed information from a reliable source. Therefore, I interviewed the youth recreation and physical activity leaders of both communities. Both provided me with some key information needed for the completion of my project. Youth recreation and physical activity is just one small part of a community, so I also had to learn about the communities as a whole. Therefore, I researched the history, culture, and demographics of the two communities, gaining perspectives of the communities in which these youth recreation programs serve. I was then able to align the information of the community with the information of the youth recreation and physical activity programs to see how the two aspects of the community play a role in each other's success. Despite the difference community contexts such as demographics population size, both the communities had strong recreation programs that were supported by hard-working and dedicated staff. However, I needed another perspective, so I turned to some more sources.

Since this paper is an auto-ethnography, I discussed my experiences as a youth participating in recreation and physical activity programs in Marlboro. To analyze different and similar experiences, I asked a high school friend from Freehold Borough to talk about his experiences as a youth Freehold Borough Recreation Department. While there were minor differences, most of our experiences were both positive and similar. I then reflected on both of our experiences, commenting and discussing how this relates to the community context and the statements made by the recreational professionals in both towns.

Overall, my project shows how regardless of space and resources, urban communities can provide similar recreational and physical activity experiences for youth as suburban communities. The key is to have a community who is willing to participate, with people in the recreation field who are dedicated to advocate for youth physical activity. I developed a great amount of information and different perspectives throughout the project on how programs of different settings succeed.

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## **Part I: Community Recreation and Physical Activity: The Components**

### **Facilities**

Facilities are an integral part to a successful physical activity or recreation environment in a community. Without the proper facilities, individuals in the community cannot participate in specific activities, particularly sport. One can describe the term *facility* in many ways regarding physical activity and recreation. A facility can be an area of open space, comprised of level ground for many varieties of play. On these open spaces, there can be specific fields for sports, such as baseball, requiring very specific field dimensions and terrain to play on. Facilities can also include closed spaces like community wellness centers which can include basketball courts, aquatic facilities, stretching rooms, etc. Most facilities of this nature require some sort of membership, paying a fee to belong and have the ability to use these facilities.

While a community may have the proper facilities to promote physical activity and recreation amongst a community, the maintenance and upkeep of these facilities is most important. The recreation and wellness organization needs to have reliable people that can maintain the facilities, which includes cleaning the facilities and grounds-keeping. If these facilities are not properly taken care of, these facilities cannot function properly, and are therefore unable to be used by people in the community. In order to provide a safe environment where people can effectively participate in physical activity and recreation, the maintenance is of most importance to the facilities.

## **Organization**

The structure and organization of a community recreation program is another crucial component to a community environment conducive to physical activity and recreation. A community should have a specific department associated with recreation and physical activity to promote amongst youth in the community. The sole purpose of the department is to oversee all of the aspects of the community with regards to recreation. These aspects include programs, facilities, public relations, volunteering, and other efforts.

The organization of a community recreation program can be broken down in many ways but should have relatively the same organizational structure. The top of the chain of command should be the head of the recreation department, an individual who oversees all of the different parts of the department itself. From the head, one can then break down the recreation department into different categories associated with the different needs of the department. The head can designate different directors for certain aspects of the recreation department to ensure the success of the organization. To start, there should be a program director who oversees and creates programs for community recreation and physical activity, such as sports leagues, races, and other events. In addition, there should be a funding director, a person who works closely with all the departments to make sure there is appropriate funding to meet the needs of the goals the organization wants to achieve. There should also be a person in charge of public relations, whose job is to promote different events associated with the community recreation department and serve as a liaison between the community and the recreation department. The public relations directors allows the community's voice be heard amongst the staff, so they can inform the department of potential events that could be happening in the community. Lastly, there needs to be a director of facilities and maintenance. This person ensures that all the facilities are properly

maintained and have adequate staff to keep the facilities clean and ready for use at any time of the year. All of the people in the recreation department work together amongst themselves and other people in the community to ensure the best possible experience and opportunity for physical activity and recreation.

## **Physical Activity and Recreation**

The term recreation has a broader meaning than just physical activity and sport, as the term encompasses a wide range of meanings regarding a person's individual time. According to leisure professional Dr. Amy R. Hurd, she defines recreation as an activity that people engage in during their free time, that people enjoy, as well as have socially redeeming values (2011). Therefore, recreation can be any activity in which the individual receives enjoyment and satisfaction engaging in the activity unwillingly. Recreation can be seen as a form of leisure, in which a person has individual free time to pursue their desires and engage in activities for their own enjoyment (Hurd, 2011). While there are three aspects into which leisure can be viewed, I consider leisure as activity for the purpose of this study. Specifically, leisure activities are pursued during free time and do not involve work oriented or house maintenance tasks (Hurd, 2011). Therefore, in terms of this study, we will be looking at leisure and recreation in the lens of physical activity and sport.

Physical activity is seen as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscle that results in an expenditure of energy (Center of Disease Control, 2016; Ayers & Sarsicsany, 2011). We see that people commonly relate physical activity with the term "exercise," when in reality the words have different meanings. Physical activity specifically focuses on body movement, where the body is not in a state of rest. Exercise also focuses on body movement in addition to strengthening parts of the body to make the individual bigger, faster, and stronger (Center for Disease Control, 2016). Therefore, while both terms refer to body movement, the terms analyze different purposes for how the body moves. In the full definition of the term, physical activities refer to any movements the body makes throughout the day, which can include any activity that makes the body move such as chores and manual labor. However, this contradicts the focus of

the study, as we are looking at leisure activities in which people complete for enjoyment, maintenance of physical fitness, and wellness. Therefore, while the term physical activity encompasses a wide range of body movements, the study will look at physical activity from the leisure and recreation perspective of professionals in the field of recreation, community members, and myself.

## **Suburban vs. Urban**

Human environments of the world are defined by terms which describe the population that lives there. These environments are categorized by both the physical appearance of the area as well as the amount of people who live there. There are three main categorizations of developed environments, suburban, urban, and rural. For the purposes of this study, we will be focusing on urban and suburban environments since the environments have extreme differences based on characteristics as set by the United States Census Bureau.

According to the United States Census, an urban environment is characterized by a population density of over 1,000 people per square mile or 2,500 or more inhabitants (2005). The main types of urban environments can be a metropolis, a population of over 1,000,000, or a city, a population of over 100,000. Areas of this nature are characterized by infrastructure and built environments. Apartments and high-rises fit massive amounts of people into one large space, increasing the population density of the environment. Examples of urban environments can be major metropolitan areas such as New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles, or smaller cities such as Syracuse, Trenton, and Fort Lauderdale. With great amounts of infrastructure and development in these areas, urban areas have limited space for new developments to occur. Throughout time, urban environments were characterized as having poor living conditions and low socioeconomic status (Kennedy, 2013).

A suburban environment is characterized by a population of less than 1,000 people per square mile (2005). Suburban areas are often described as having large amounts of space with open greens and houses. The environments have an abundant amount of flatland making development of new construction obtainable. These environments are placed outside of major cities, making residents who live there commute to the urban area for work. On the contrary of

urban environments, suburbs were characterized for middle to upper class families to move. Throughout the 1950's, the United States experienced a major move to suburbia, as the baby boom required families to find bigger spaces to support their families (Kennedy, 2013). The growth in childbirth rates required parents to buy larger living spaces to support their growing family. In the United States today, there are many suburban communities all placed outside of urban areas, with distinct differences in socioeconomic statuses and class.

From mere observation, there are distinct differences between the urban community of Freehold Borough and the suburban community of Marlboro. The study looks to see how the human environment of these two places effects the opportunities for recreation and physical activity for the people that inhabit the areas. Having a clear definition of these urban planning terms will allow for further clarification in assessing the two communities through the lens of physical activity.

## **Part II: Freehold Borough**

### **Background Information**

The Borough of Freehold is a small section of the Township of Freehold in Monmouth County, New Jersey. Overall, the borough is not a large area, as the land area only encompasses about 1.9 squares miles (Freehold Borough Website, 2017). The borough was founded in 1879 and was known as a major site during the Revolutionary War. The current population of Freehold Borough is 12,047, which is a slight decrease from the 2010 Census recorded population of 12,052 (United States Census, 2017). The ethnic make-up of Freehold Borough is 42.87% Hispanic or Latino, 41.1% White, 12.57% Black or African American, as well as other races such as Native American and Pacific Islander (City Data, 2017). There is a high population of foreign born, roughly 36.2%, with 30% of the people from Latin America. This is greater than the foreign born percentage of the State of New Jersey at 21.6% (City Data). Out of the individuals who reside in the Borough of Freehold, the majority are ages 25 to 44 (32.4%) followed by youth under the age of 18 (24.5%) (City Data, 2017). According to the United States Census, the organization characterizes Freehold Borough as an inner-city for having over 1,000 people per square mile in the area (United States Census Bureau, 2015).

The average per capita income for a resident living in Freehold Borough is \$23,331, with a median family or household income of about \$52,000 (City Data, 2017). Of the people who live in the Borough of Freehold, about 13.1% of these individuals live below the poverty line. The majority of males in Freehold Borough have occupations in the food service industry, for both preparing and serving food (23.1%), followed by building, grounds cleaning and maintenance professions (19.6%). As for females, most have occupations as office or administrative support staff (14.7 %), followed by food service occupations (14.6 %) (City Data,



2017). In 2015, about 5% of the population of Freehold Borough was unemployed, and that number has since increased over the past year (City Data, 2017). This number is just below the state unemployment rate at 4.2% (New Jersey Department of Labor, 2017).

The best way to describe the Borough of Freehold is a small downtown area which is part of a greater suburban community. The community has seen a great amount of growth and development in the past couple of decades. As a key town in the Revolutionary War, many of the buildings have stood the test of time from decades past. As you enter the Borough, you are bombarded with Victorian styles homes on either side of the street. As you move further into the borough, you reach Main Street (County Road 537), leading into the downtown area. During the 1920's, Freehold Borough was a factory town, serving as the main source of how people made a living. Carl N. Steinberg is a current business owner in Freehold Borough as well as a New Jersey Historian who grew up in Freehold Borough. He remembers the town as a close knit community where everyone who lived there worked in the downtown area or the factory. The downtown area is centered on the Freehold Borough Hall of Records, surrounded by many different shops, restaurants, and other small businesses. According to one long-time Freehold Resident, "The Borough has seen a renaissance of sorts in the past decade, as the town is always looking to improve the area and make it more appealing to outsiders to visit" (The Borough of Freehold, 2017). Within recent years, the town placed brick sidewalks to increase pedestrian traffic through the town (The Borough of Freehold, 2017). With the recent improvements that the Borough has made in the past decade, Freehold has seen an increase in the amount of people living there.

The demographics of Freehold Borough has changed over the past twenty years. The area has seen an increase in the immigrant population from Latin and Central America, increasing the

diversity in the borough. This spike of immigrants started between the 1990s and 2000s (Yi, 2015). According to the United States census, roughly 44% of the population of Freehold Borough is Hispanic or Latino. The town was settled by Scottish, Irish, and African-American migrants who would come to Freehold Borough to exchange farm goods, work in the factory, or run their business (Yi, 2015). Currently, Freehold is mainly home to law offices and restaurants, which are primarily run by Spanish workers. About half the population of Freehold Borough is Hispanic, which has changed the culture of the area tremendously. Businesses, restaurants, and other aspects of Freehold have adapted to the Latino culture that lives there. On a daily basis, immigrant day laborers wait for work on a busy intersection in Freehold, as they write their name on a list and are hired based on the order of that list. According to Steinberg, he feels that the community has accepted the wave of Latino immigrants and has done everything in their power to provide support and assistance to them. The community still remains close, as all the races and cultures that reside in Freehold still walk the same streets and live their daily lives.

### **Recreational and Physical Activity Facilities and Programs**

The Freehold Borough Recreation Department is a very small division in their community government. The department is run entirely by volunteers, who only meet on a bi-weekly basis to discuss upcoming programs and events. For my research, the members of the Freehold Borough Recreation Department were not willing to speak to me, so I spoke with Pat Reuter. While Reuter does not work directly with the recreation department, she assists the department by accommodating the needs of the recreation staff, such as scheduling appointments, inter-department communication, as well as writing minutes during department meetings. Reuter told me that since Freehold Borough is a small community, most of the wellness programs for youth are run through the Freehold Borough Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). The department coordinates with the YMCA at times to put on special events, but really does not have any involvement in physical activity and wellness programs. Therefore, to find out more information about the physical activity and wellness programs for youth in Freehold Borough, I decided to contact the YMCA.

When contacting the YMCA of Freehold Borough, I had the opportunity to speak with the director, Mel O'Neal. Mel has been the director of the YMCA of Freehold Borough for almost twenty years and has seen the community grow since the time in which he started. As a YMCA in an urban neighborhood, O'Neal's main goal is to provide a "safe haven for youth in the community, a place where youth can come together and learn to have fun" (Mel O'Neal, Personal Interview, 2017). The Freehold Borough YMCA focuses on the mind, body and spirit of youths in the community. When I heard O'Neal describe this philosophy, I was reminded of a major symbol of Hawaiian culture called the Lohaki Wheel. The Lohaki Wheel as a symbol of Hawaiian culture that represents how a person should strive to live a balanced life in all areas of

their personal health (Tellehojan, 2013). As O’Neal was describing the programs of the YMCA to me, it seemed that the mission of the Freehold Borough YMCA is consistent with this symbol of health.

The Freehold Borough YMCA provides adequate opportunities for youth recreation and physical activity. O’Neal said that their most popular program offered is the Colonial Youth Basketball League. The league has students from kindergarten to eighth grade and is a co-ed program. Players participate in practices as well as games, and according to O’Neal, the players take this “very seriously.” The YMCA has a gym that can be used for open basketball on a daily basis for students to practice, in addition to playing other sports that they desire. The YMCA also has limited fitness equipment that youth can use to exercise. In addition to the open gym and exercise programs, youth can participate in aquatic activities. The Freehold Borough YMCA partners with the YMCA of Western Monmouth County so they can utilize their pool and aquatic facilities. O’Neal says that the Freehold Borough YMCA is very grateful of this partnership, giving youth the opportunity to swim and engage in aquatic activities. In addition, the YMCA of Freehold Borough also has a high and low ropes course which is used during youth programs for teambuilding activities.

Aside from physical activity, the Freehold Borough YMCA provides programs for youth leisure. Youth can participate in various clubs that offer certain activities as well as getting them involved in the community. Youth can participate in activities such as arts and crafts, chess, ping pong, and many others. The YMCA has a Model United Nations club in which each student represents a country and must figure out how to solve specific issues in their country. The club then travels to share their proposals with other Model United Nations around the country to see if their proposal can become approved. The YMCA also runs an “Achievers Club,” youth in the

community who are involved in community service events around Monmouth County. O'Neal stated that this club allows youth "to get involved in the community and learn how to take responsibility for themselves and their actions." The club has done many great acts of community service for the community and looks to do more in the future (Mel O'Neal, Personal Interview, 2017).

Overall recreation plays a major role in the community of Freehold Borough. O'Neal described that recreation can "bring the community together, giving them a reason to congregate and enjoy" (Mel O'Neal, Personal Interview, 2017). With a strong foundational philosophy and mission, the Freehold Borough YMCA is dedicated to serving the members of their community. They look to enhance the physical and social development of youth who live in the community of Freehold Borough. O'Neal claimed that the YMCA is always changing, as the organization in the community needs to adapt to the people that live there (Mel O'Neal, Personal Interview, 2017). The staff at the Freehold Borough YMCA are constantly thinking of ways on how to improve their youth programs and make an impact to this close, tight-knit community. Through their commitment to the community and programming, their mission is to enhance the quality of life for all youth in Freehold Borough and developing them into "successful leaders of the future" (Mel O'Neal, Personal Interview, 2017).

## **Funding**

The Recreation Department of Freehold Borough receives their income from numerous sources. Most of the money comes from utilization fees, where people pay to use the spaces that are owned by the recreation department. While these spaces are open to the public, people who want to use these places for official games, practices, and other events must pay the recreation department for their use. Other sources of revenue come from the recreational opportunities offered for both youth and adults. The money that is collected from these programs helps the program run smoothly and efficiently. This includes maintenance of the facilities, providing equipment, as well as paying other people who might be involved such as officials or scorekeepers. Since Freehold Borough is a relatively small community, the recreation department claimed that they have just enough funds to ensure their operations are maintained. However, the funding from the Freehold Borough Recreation Department does play a major role in the upkeep of the YMCA.

According to Mr. O'Neal, the Freehold Borough Recreation Department plays a major role in the success of the Freehold Borough YMCA. O'Neal states that the department has been "a huge help" in providing the people that use the YMCA with the experience they are looking for (Mel O'Neal, Personal Interview, 2017). People from the recreation committee have volunteered with the YMCA in certain events to replace the need of paying people to help run activities and events. O'Neal told me that funding has never really been an issue for the YMCA, as they have received great sums of money by applying to grants. The grants that the YMCA has applied for look to serve urban communities and help them obtain the resources needed to run a successful YMCA program. The YMCA has also used this money to provide scholarships for families to join specific programs that the YMCA has to offer. Despite the cost of the programs,

the YMCA of Freehold Borough does not have a membership fee. That means that any person in the community can come into the YMCA and use the facilities for free, as long as they sign up with the YMCA. With support from the town recreation department, scholarships, and grants, O'Neal stated that socioeconomic status has never really been too much of an issue for youth to get involved in the recreation and physical activity opportunities in the community. The mission of the YMCA to promote a healthy mind, body, and spirit to members of the community, especially youth. The combination of free membership to the facilities with the abundance of youth programs and resources allows the Freehold Borough YMCA to promote the mission to the community.

## **Community Needs**

Since Freehold Borough is an urban community, youth safety is a major concern for parents in the area. According to O'Neal, parents do not want their children around the community unsupervised, as this can cause great harm and can threaten their safety. Most children have parents that work, so there is a period of time after school where children may be unsupervised. Keeping this in mind, O'Neal wants to provide a place for youth to go where they can feel safe under the supervision of adults. The YMCA of Freehold Borough and the recreation programs they offer keep children off the streets and help them grow both physically as well as socially. O'Neal strives to make sure that all youth have a place that they can come to and not worry about being at home by themselves.

With the diversity that Freehold Borough has in the community, the town seemed to have needed a place where everyone can get together. Recreation and physical activity, according to O'Neal, bring the youth community together for a common purpose, enjoyment of physical activity and living a healthy lifestyle. O'Neal also stated that youth in the community need to be taught how to take responsibility for their actions (Mel O'Neal, Personal Interview, 2017). He believes that the YMCA provides youth with ways in which they can learn responsibility through recreation and physical activity. This includes showing up to games, practices, club meetings, events, and other activities that each organization in the recreation department has. By learning how to take responsibility for their actions, youth will be better prepared for the real world, says O'Neal, contributing to their mental and emotional health. Overall, youth in the community of Freehold Borough need an outlet, a place where they can come to participate in activities to enjoy as well as learn ways to improve their overall health. O'Neal believes that both the



Freehold Borough Recreation Department and the Freehold Borough YMCA provide these opportunities for youth.

## **Cultural Influences**

With the diversity of the individuals who reside in Freehold Borough, the recreation programs strive to meet the cultural needs of every person in the community. When speaking with O'Neal about how culture effects the programming of the YMCA, he responded very enthusiastically. O'Neal calls the programming committee of the YMCA of Freehold Borough "cultural architects" (Mel O'Neal, Personal Interview, 2017). The staff must design recreation programs that are going to fit the cultural needs of youth in the community. The ultimate goal is for youth to be engaged in these programs to promote their philosophy of achieving a healthy mind, body and spirit. O'Neal and his staff frequently reach out to the community to gather ideas for future programming and how they can fit these needs appropriately. They want to recognize all the ethnicities that exist in the community of Freehold Borough, making sure that nobody is left out from participating.

After speaking with the Freehold Borough Recreation department, Mrs. Reuter did not comment on how the recreation department fits these cultural needs. She told me that the YMCA is mainly involved with making sure that programs are culturally relevant for the people that live in the community (Pat Reuter, Personal Interview, 2017). Culture is an aspect of recreation for the YMCA of Freehold Borough that is taken with great responsibility. The branch understands that the community does have many different ethnicities represented and strives to reach out to all ethnic groups in the community. "How can we expect parents to bring their children to our community center if we cannot provide programs that they actually want to do?" O'Neal commented when talking about how culture plays a role in the community. Safety is also a concern when thinking about the cultural needs of youth in the community. O'Neal wants to create an environment where all cultures can feel safe and accepted in one space. Youth from

different cultures in the community can come together and recreate in a space that is safe and engaging, where they can interact with their peers. Overall, O'Neal believes that the Freehold Borough YMCA addresses the cultural needs of the community and looks figure out more ways on how to address these needs (Mel O'Neal, Personal Interview, 2017). He looks to make the YMCA an accessible place for all community members to attend and engage in recreational activities.

## **Access**

All the parks and facilities in Freehold Borough are accessible to the residents that live there. While there are only three parks in the area, residents can use them at any time of the year and use the facilities that are located in these parks. These parks offer scenic walk-ways, with benches so people can sit and enjoy views of trees and even a lake (Lake Topanemus). Two of the three parks have playgrounds and open spaces where youth can play and recreate with each other. The parks do not take up much land, so space in these parks for recreation is very limited according to Reuter (Reuter, Personal Interview, 2017). With regards to the community YMCA, that facility is also accessible for all residents as well. Each community member gets a free membership to the Freehold Borough YMCA as long as they register with the branch itself. All youth can participate in the programs that the YMCA offers. Scholarships help out families of youth in need of financial assistance to pay the fees associated with some of the programs. With the services and limited fees that the recreation department and the YMCA provides to the residents of the community, O'Neal states that the facilities are accessible to youth in the area and encourages all youth to take advantages of these opportunities.

## **Community Response**

O'Neal says that the YMCA has made a major impact on youth recreation and physical activity in the community of Freehold Borough. Since Freehold Borough is a very small urban community, there are not many outdoor spaces for youth to participate in physical activity. These spaces are small and mainly surrounded by residential area. O'Neal states that parents of youth in the community sometimes worry about their child's safety, as they do not want their children to be in these public, open spaces by themselves (Mel O'Neal, Personal Interview, 2017). As mentioned, O'Neal strives to provide a place where youth can come to feel safe and participate in quality physical activity and recreation programs (Mel O'Neal, Personal Interview, 2017). The programs at the YMCA receive a great amount of support from the town recreation department, as O'Neal claims he is very grateful for all of their help. "Without their [the recreation department] help, the programs at the YMCA would not be successful," says O'Neal (Mel O'Neal, Personal Interview, 2017).

According to O'Neal, the community is very active in the programs that the YMCA offers. The members take advantage of the programs, using them as a way to become an active participant in the community. Since the YMCA is so accessible to the community members of Freehold Borough, O'Neal says that the members of the community are more likely to be engaged in the programs offered and become a part of the community. The funding provided by the recreation department of Freehold Borough gives people in the community the opportunity to participate in the programs and receive full benefits. When asked about the overall lifestyle of the community of Freehold Borough, O'Neal said that Freehold Borough is a "very active community" (Mel O'Neal, Personal Interview, 2017). This statement is based on the member enrollment of the Freehold Borough YMCA over the past five years. O'Neal states that the

Freehold Borough YMCA has seen a 40% in enrollment over the past five years (Mel O'Neal, Personal Interview, 2017). Therefore, he feels that the community is enjoying the recreational opportunities provided by the Freehold Borough YMCA (Mel O'Neal, Personal Interview, 2017). The amount of participation in the YMCA shows that the community members of Freehold Borough enjoy participating in physical activity and being active. O'Neal stated that the this increased participation is due to the loyalty of people to the community and an effort to make recreation in Freehold Borough fun and engaging.

### **Part III: Experience of a Youth in Freehold Borough**

This part of the project looks at the recreational and physical activity experiences of an individual who lived in Freehold Borough during his youth. Listening to the experiences of a youth who participated in recreational and physical activity programs allows me to get a feel for the community from a participant's perspective. One can see if the participant's experiences is similar to the statements made by the recreational leader of the community or community organization. For this part of the project, I wanted to see if a former youth participant's experiences in the Freehold Borough Recreation Department were consistent with the statements made by Mr. O'Neal. I was looking for an individual who sought out many different recreational opportunities regarding sport and physical activity as a community member of Freehold Borough. Going to a high school with classmates from many different towns, I knew some people who were from the community of Freehold Borough, and could possibly fit my description. Keeping all of these factors in mind, I had the opportunity to catch up with an old friend. For confidentiality reasons, this person kindly asked to use a pseudonym for the purposes of this project. Therefore, he will be referred to as "T". T is a 22 year-old white male who has lived in Freehold Borough for most of his life.

Even before I had met T in high school, he and his family have been residents of the community of Freehold Borough for a majority of his life (T, Personal Interview, 2017). When asked about his thoughts on the changes of the community of Freehold Borough, he stated that the community "has not changed too much during his life. People may come and go, but overall the sense of comfort he has in his community remains constant" (T, Personal Interview, 2017). He always remembers Freehold Borough as a very culturally diverse place, despite the fact that the town is very small (T, Personal Interview, 2017). "Just go to the downtown area of Freehold

Borough and you'll see," T remarks, "people from different cultures are all around the area."

He has been an active member of the community of Freehold Borough and has done many good deeds to enhance the community. As an Eagle Scout, T helped create a garden behind a historic house in Freehold for his Eagle Scout project, as well as other community service works. In addition to his involvement in the community, he has participated in various recreation programs offered by the town recreation department.

As a youth in the community of Freehold Borough, T was quite active throughout his childhood. He had grown up with numerous siblings who gave him the motivation to participate in sports and physical activities to compete with them. When asked about his level of physical activity as a child, T claimed that he remained active for most of his youth years. During his childhood, T participated in the recreational soccer league run by the Freehold Borough recreation department, as well as the youth basketball league run by the Freehold Borough YMCA and community center. In addition, T was a member of the local Boy Scout troop in the community (T, Personal Interview, 2017). Despite the fact that the troop is not affiliated with the recreation department, he remained active through his participation in various outdoor, recreational activities such as hiking, backpacking, white water rafting, and many others. Whether through participation in Boy Scouts or programs through the town recreation department, T always found a way to stay physically active during his entire childhood.

T was aware of all the opportunities for physical activity as a child. His family was and continues to be very active in the community, therefore he was always exposed to the opportunities and events that were available. I asked T to describe his thoughts on the amount of opportunities to be physically active in Freehold Borough. He personally found that there were enough physical activity and recreation opportunities for his satisfaction, however this might not



have been the same for other people. “Again, the size of the community does play a huge role in this [opportunities for physical activity], as I feel that there are some people who may just want a little more,” T states (T, Personal Interview, 2017). In other words, a person may want a little more variety in the opportunities for recreation and physical activity, especially if they are as active as he was as a youth.

T was asked about the quality of the facilities and programs of the Freehold Recreation Department, as well as the organization. He stated that the facilities were well-maintained and provided a space that was adequate for participation of the programs (T, Personal Interview, 2017). The facilities provided a space where an individual can participate in these physical activities to their full potential. However, Ted did comment on the amount of facilities available. Since the community of Freehold Borough is small, he recalled that the number of people who could participate in these programs to be limited (T, Personal Interview, 2017). He would recall friends of his that were locked out of participation, claiming the cause was lack of space for programs. In addition, he claims that the community does not have many spaces to engage in physical activity in one’s own personal time. “There are just not too many places to go since the community is so small. If you wanted to go to a space to play, you always had to expect that some part would be taken” (T, Personal Interview, 2017). Despite these minor details, the quality of the programs were enjoyable according to Ted. He had numerous, positive experiences participating in the recreation programs at Freehold Borough. The programs allowed for him to participate in physical activities and recreational programs that he enjoyed, keeping him physically active throughout his whole childhood. Ted felt that he grew both “physically and socially” from these programs (T, Personal Interview, 2017). His physical fitness and skills were enhanced through his participation in the specific physical activities, as well as increasing his

social health since he met many friends during participation. Overall, Ted's the quality and organization of the programs and facilities in Freehold Borough has been positive.

Lastly, I had asked Ted to comment on how the cultural influences of Freehold Borough effected his experiences through physical activity in the town recreation department. When asked this question, Ted needed to take some time to gather his thoughts, as he never thought about how the two concepts were related. Unwillingly thinking about the influences of culture for physical activity in the community, Ted came to the conclusion that culture did play some role in his recreation and physical activity experiences (T, Personal Interview, 2017). He recalled of watching community members who came from places in Latin-America gathering together in community parks to participate in physical activities such as baseball and basketball, but primarily soccer. Whether he was physically at the park with his friends or looking at the park from a distance, he would constantly see people from the same cultural background engage in those physical activities. He stated that the mix of cultures in the community segregates people from participating in "pick-up" games in local parks (T, Personal Interview, 2017). "People would try to avoid conversation with others from different cultures in these types of settings simply because they thought they could not understand us" Ted commented (T, Personal Interview, 2017). These confrontations were quite normal, even outside of a physical activity or recreation setting according to Ted. While people may not realize the impact on a daily basis, Ted claimed that culture may have more of an impact on the recreation and physical activity experience of people in the community of Freehold Borough.

Ted's experiences for physical activity in the Freehold Borough recreation department have been positive. While he claims he is not as physically active as he once was, he still remembers good memories of his experiences in youth sports. He met many people that he still

keeps in touch with to this very day, and is grateful that he had the opportunity to engage in such programs. “When I look back on my experiences participating in these activities, I can honestly say that the organization [Freehold Borough Recreation Department] played a major role in the success of these programs. I could not have asked for a better experience participating in these activities” (T, Personal Interview, 2017).

## **Part IV: Marlboro, New Jersey**

### **Background Information**

Marlboro, New Jersey is located in Monmouth County in the central part of the state. Marlboro was founded in 1848 and was named after the marl, a mudstone, beds found in the area. According to the 2010 United States Census, the population of Marlboro at the time was 40,191. In 2016, the population of Marlboro is 40,671, meaning an increase of 480 people throughout the past six years. The community is primarily White, which makes up 78.59% of the population. Some of the following races include 17.27% Asian, 2.09% African-American or Black, and 1.34% other races.

Marlboro is mainly comprised of middle to upper class families, as the median family income was \$145,302 in 2010, only having 1.6% of families falling below the poverty line. The majority of the residents who live in Marlboro are ages 45 to 64, 32.6%. Most of the people who live in Marlboro have families, which make up about 46.6% of the population. With that said, youth, ages 18 and younger, make up the second most population of the town at 28.8%. The most common industries for males include finance and insurance (15%) followed by professional, scientific, and technical services (14%) (City Data, 2017). The majority female occupations in Marlboro are educational services (14%), followed by finance and insurance industries (11 %). The unemployment rate in Marlboro currently stands at 4.2% (United States Department of Labor, 2017).

Marlboro has seen a great amount of change in the past 50 years due to the reconstruction of the community. The town had changed from a small farming community to a suburb community during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the 1970's to about the mid 1980's,

Marlboro still had cobblestone streets and was not developed into a full living community. There were great open fields and spaces for farmland which made the town not really develop. The population was quite small at the time only increasing by about 5,000 people from 1970 to 1980. However, during the 1990s, Marlboro started to see an increase in population due to the infrastructure built at the time. As resident Gary Vorhees described “Many more of the streets have sidewalks and the cow pastures have turned into housing communities” (New York Times, 1993). The cobblestone streets turned into state highways that made Marlboro accessible from other towns across Monmouth County and the state of New Jersey. Mayor Matthew Scanapeico, the Mayor of Marlboro at the time, implemented major housing projects during the 1990’s that would create housing developments across the town. He also called for the construction for other town amenities such as restaurants, places of worship, beauty parlors, super markets, and other clothing and appliance stores. All of these major developments lead to an increase in population from 1990 and beyond.

The construction lead to an increase in population by almost 10,000 from 1980 to 1990. Many young people saw the developments that Scanapeico was making at the time. These young people came from urban areas such as Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Staten Island and became interested in Marlboro when they found out they were having children. They saw Marlboro as a pleasant suburban community that would be a great place to start and raise a family. Today, there are approximately 13,001 houses in Marlboro, with an average house cost of about \$336,400. The town has been one of the safest places to live and raise a family in the state of New Jersey in 2015 and 2016 (New Jersey Magazine, 2015, 2016).

## **Recreational and Physical Activity Facilities and Programs**

With regards to parks and recreation in the town of Marlboro, the community has a vast park system around various areas of the town. In Marlboro, there are fourteen parks all with different facilities and uses. These facilities range from ball fields, to basketball courts, tennis courts, soccer fields, walking and hiking trails and others. The town has two public pool facilities, the Marlboro Swim Club and the Marlboro Aquatic center, containing Olympic sized swimming pools for exercise, as well as pools for younger children with shallow water and slides. All of these recreational areas are in easy driving distance to each other and are located in various parts of the community.

The central hub for the recreation department in Marlboro is at the Marlboro Recreational Center, located in the heart of town. This complex contains all the recreational offices, as well as other facilities such as a gym, outdoor basketball courts, outdoor hockey rink, soccer fields, a baseball field and an artificial turf football field. In the past, the Marlboro Township Recreation Department and the Parks Committee were two separate boards. Recently, the two joined together to form the Marlboro Township Recreation Advisory Committee. Within this committee, there is a division for aquatics called the Swim Utility. The Swim Utility monitors and maintains all the public pools in the town, as well as advocate for water conservation. The recreation committee has their own website, where community members can search and sign up for different programs and learn about different events in the town. There are extensive amounts of opportunities for a youth who lives in Marlboro to get involved in the recreation department as well as stay active in the community.

In order for children to participate in youth sports in the town of Marlboro, they must attend an accredited public or private kindergarten or higher grade program in the town. Youth

must also live in the town of Marlboro to participate as well. The families of the children must pay a recreational fee for participation in the sport, which covers use of the facilities, equipment, officials, uniforms, and other expenses. The town does offer financial assistance through the form of scholarships to those who need help covering these fees. Marlboro has a variety of youth programs where children can stay active and participate in recreation programs. The town has youth sport leagues for soccer in the fall and spring, as well as basketball in the winter time. Marlboro uses all of the parks with soccer fields in the area for their games and for basketball, the town uses the local schools' gymnasiums. The town also offers a youth wrestling program, in which students train at the local high school and compete against other towns in New Jersey. For more instructional opportunities, the town does run camps for basketball, soccer, and tennis. Youth of all ages can participate in these classes and learn to improve or refine their skills. The recreation department has other opportunities for children to participate in leisure activities. During the summer months, the recreation department runs a summer camp for youth of all ages. This camp allows students to participate in various sport and leisure activities, as well as takes youth places around the area for enjoyment. Throughout the year, the recreation department does have programs for students to participate in leisure activities. Activities include cooking classes, dance classes, family fun programs, pre-school programs, and others.

In addition to youth opportunities in the town recreation department, there are also private athletics organizations in which youth participate in as well. Marlboro Little League provides youth with opportunities to participate in baseball and softball during the fall and spring months. Youth can also participate in tackle football, as the town has teams who compete in the Pop Warner league and the American Youth Football League. For youth who are not interested in playing tackle football, the town offers a flag football league run by Play 60, an organization

that partners with the National Football League. Adolescents can engaged in opportunities for physical activity and exercise in the many privately owned gyms in Marlboro. Marlboro has various travel teams for the sports of baseball, soccer, and basketball. Each of these teams has their own organization and partner up with the town recreation department (or Little League in the case of baseball) to provide youth with the opportunity to travel and compete against higher levels of competition. With these organizations, there are separate fees associated with them, and youth often have to participate in recreational league to be eligible to compete on the travel team. The town has over five gyms owned by private companies such as New York Sports Club, Retro Fitness, Work Out World, MAX Fitness, and Fusion Fitness. Youth ages 16 and older can enroll in these gyms and pay a monthly fee to use the facilities to work out. Between these private organizations and the recreation department, youth have many opportunities to participate in physical activity, recreation, and leisure activities.



## **Funding**

According to Ted Durnst, the Director of the Marlboro Township Recreation Department, he said that funding for the programs of the recreation department has “never been too much of an issue” (Durnst, Personal Interview, 2017). Due to the town’s socioeconomic status, most of the residents who have their children participate in physical activity and recreation programs in Marlboro can afford to have their child participate. However, if a family does not have the funds to have their child participate in a recreation program, the department does give out money in the form of scholarships for families to take advantage of. These scholarships are based on the children who receive free or reduced school lunch in the schools in or around Marlboro. Since youth who participate in these programs must live in Marlboro and attend one of the schools in the general area, the recreation department can contact the schools to see which students receive free or reduced lunch and hand out the scholarships based on that. As Durnst stated in his interview, “We pride ourselves on making sure every kid who wants to play has the opportunity to play” (Durnst, Personal Interview, 2017).

The Marlboro Recreation Department receives their funding from a wide variety of sources. Their main source of income is user fees, money they collect from people who want to use the town facilities. These people can include local, private teams who want to use the facilities as their home playing area or even charity organizations who want to use the facilities for an event. These user fees are then used for maintenance of the facilities and to pay the staff of the recreation department. The recreation department also receives some money from taxes, however the department can only use this tax money for non-program based activities and events. These include events such as the town’s summer concert series as well as a town festival called Marlboro Day. The town receives donations as well. Durnst claims that the department

receives anywhere from \$25,000 to \$30,000 in donations per year, which helps with the scholarship program as well as other recreation programs and events throughout the year.

## **Community Needs**

When Durnst first started his time as the Director of Recreation, he wanted to make sure that all community members of Marlboro had opportunities for leisure and recreation throughout the year. He claims that recreation is an integral part of any community, as members look to the recreation department for providing a quality experience for activities of enjoyment (Durnst, Personal Interview, 2017). With that in mind, Durnst said that the community needs a variety of recreational and leisure experiences for youth to participate in. The youth population of Marlboro is growing, as he has found that more young families are moving to Marlboro and want their children to be involved in the community. By providing recreational and physical activity opportunities for youth of all age levels, Durnst feels that the recreation department meets these needs because of all the programs they offer. The recreation department offers a variety of youth programs for children of all age levels. They run instructional camps for youth who are still trying to develop or refine skills for different sports. In addition, the recreation department has other activities that youth can get involved in as well, such as dance classes, cooking classes, and summer camps during the months of June through August. Ultimately, Durnst said that parents do not want their children sitting in the house, but rather to have their children get involved and active to meet different people and to find activities that they truly enjoy.

## **Cultural Influences**

From looking at the demographics of Marlboro, there are many different cultures and races that inhabit the community. With that said, Durnst made a clear point during the interview, saying that the recreation department does not show any bias against the different cultures and ethnic background in Marlboro (Durnst, Personal Interview, 2017). Durnst claims that culture does not play as much of a role in the recreation and community programs as some other communities in the surrounding area. Most of the programs that the recreation department offers are appealing to youth and families of all cultures, and that families of all ethnic backgrounds want their children to participate in these programs. Looking at the culture of the community, Durnst said that the people who live in the town of Marlboro has always been accepting of different cultures (Durnst, Personal Interview, 2017). As seen through the recreation programs, most community members put these differences aside from one another and simply enjoy their common interest in the recreational activity. He does his best to make sure there is no bias in any of the programs, especially youth sport programs. Durnst has seen instances of racism in youth sports in the past, such as a coach discriminating players because of their race, not playing them in a game. He and the Marlboro Recreation Department takes all measures to prevent those instances from occurring. Players and coaches in Marlboro Recreation youth sports programs must sign a contract saying they will abide by all of the rules and regulations set by the Marlboro Recreation, which includes not discriminating against other individuals who may come from different parts of the world. In his experiences with the program, most players and coaches follow this contract and show respect towards individuals of different cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Religious headwear, jewelry, and other articles of clothing can be worn by youth when participating in physical activity or sports, as common with most recreation departments.

Durnst has also tried to make more of an effort to create more cultural diverse programs in the town of Marlboro. In recent years, the town's recreation department has formed a cultural committee, a group of community members who try to provide culturally relevant activities for members of the community. Recently, the committee has been working with the Hindu population of Marlboro on trying to create a cricket program, ranging from youth to adult levels. Since cricket is a popular sport in their home country, the Hindu members of the community wanted a program that provided organized cricket games for people of all ages. The recreation department is taking numerous measures to make sure that they can provide the experience for the people. The committee has reached out to religious leaders of the Hindu temple in Marlboro, as well as the people who attend the temple. Durnst tries to make the recreation and leisure programs of Marlboro as culturally relevant as possible. While the programs may be relevant with one of a few cultures, Durnst says that these programs are open to all community members, as he encourages people to get involved and be exposed to these different programs. Exposure to different cultures, says Durnst, provides a different perspective to individuals, and allows community members to break out of their comfort zone and explore a new activity (Durnst, Personal Interview, 2017).

## Access

As Durnst described earlier in the interview, he wants all youth to be able to participate in programs as well as get involved in the community (Durnst, Personal Interview, 2017). The recreation department tries to ensure that all children who want to participate have the opportunity to. In addition to the programs, Durnst also wants children to try to remain active on a daily basis by utilizing the parks and other open spaces of recreation in the area. Marlboro has many different recreational facilities that can be used all community members on a daily basis. There are thirteen parks and outdoor facilities that are spread out throughout the township. Some of the parks are right in the neighborhoods where community members reside, so youth can easily walk to these parks and access them on a daily basis. Each of the parks have different amenities and facilities such as playgrounds, basketball courts, tennis courts, ball fields. However, they all have open spaces for youth to participate in any kind of activity. Youth are free to use any of the park facilities at any time of the day, unless the facilities has been reserved by the recreation department for a specific period of time.

Durnst said that making these facilities accessible to youth increases the participation in the recreation programs as well as the promotion of a physically active environment in the town. Youth in the community have the ability to use the facilities and engage in social behaviors through recreation and physical activity opportunities. Knowing that youth only get limited opportunities for recreation and physical activity in school, Durnst encourages youth to use the parks and facilities in the town as a way to increase their level of physical activity and promote wellness of all youth community members.

## **Community Response**

With all of the following in mind, Durnst feels that the community's role in the recreation department leads to increase youth participation in the recreation and physical activity programs (Durnst, Personal Interview, 2017). The recreation department has a committee of volunteers who try to provide community youth with positive recreational experiences. These individuals meet on a regular basis to discuss on how to improve the experiences for youth community members, enhancing their physical and social development. For example, the volunteer committee has a youth sports round table, where individuals who coach in the recreation department come together to discuss and share ideas on how to be an effective coach in youth sports. With these volunteers of different committees meeting on a regular basis, Durnst claims that the recreation programs have significantly grown and developed since his time as the Director of Recreation. Parents of youth participants have provided positive feedback to the recreation programs.

Durnst tries to make all voices of the community heard and will attend to the needs of all community members (Durnst, Personal Interview, 2017). Durnst states that the parents of the community are actively engaged and interested in their child's youth recreational experiences. He quoted that "Marlboro parents are not afraid to speak their mind, and they will go through all measures to ensure that their voice is heard" (Durnst, Personal Interview, 2017). The recreation department tries to fit the needs of all community members and ensure that youth have a positive experience. He can tell if people are having a positive experience based on the number of kids participating in the youth programs. Each year, he analyzes the number of youth that participate in youth programs and bases the success off of those numbers. In recent years, Durnst claims that the number of youth that participate in these programs has significantly increases about 10%

each year (Durnst, Personal Interview, 2017). He says that the increase is due to the constant effort of the department and the volunteer's dedication to providing positive experiences for youth in recreation and physical activity (Durnst, Personal Interview, 2017). With the number of individuals who participate in these youth programs, Durnst would categorize the town of Marlboro as a community that is active and involved in matters related to recreation and physical activity.



## **Part V: My Experience**

When deciding on how to spend my free time outside of school, engaging in some sort of physical activity was always the first option on my mind. The routine was when I finished my homework, my brother and I would go outside and find something to do until the sun went down. Physical activity was always a major part of my life for as long as I could remember, and I tried to remain as physically active as possible during my childhood without really realizing the good I was doing for my body. I was always willing to try new activities, and was open to anything as long as I was moving in some capacity. Engaging in these behaviors lead to how I chose organized activities outside of school. Most of these were sports that were organized through the town recreation department. There were many factors that led me to participate in these activities. However, I can say that community environment of the recreation department and the people of Marlboro played a huge role into my level of engagement in physical activity and recreation during my youth.

From an outsider's perspective, one may look at Marlboro as a fully-developed, close knit community in a suburb of New Jersey. To be frank, Marlboro does display these qualities, as the community is well bonded, despite the fact that the town is one of the largest in Monmouth County. Every youth resident has a distinct perception of what Marlboro means to them and how they view the town as compared to other places. In talking with some of the people I grew up with over the years, they have described to me their views on growing up in Marlboro. On one hand, you have some individuals who see Marlboro as "boring," with little excitement or depth, just your standard American small-town. In my interactions with these individuals throughout the course of this study, I have found that these people were not truly involved in the community, and if they were, their involvement was at a bare minimum. These individuals would have rather

lived in a nearby area with more energy and aura, such as a town by the Jersey Shore or New York City. On the other hand, however, some individuals were grateful of their experiences growing up in Marlboro, views that were very similar to mine.

As my one friend said to me, “Marlboro has everything that you need in one little town. Filled with a sense of community and closeness that when you return, you truly feel at home.” (Jesse, Personal Interview, 2017). People who enjoyed their experience growing up in Marlboro said that the town was a place where they felt safe and had the possibility to engage in activities they wanted to do. Those who grew up in Marlboro are truly fortunate that they had the opportunity to grow up in such a well-rounded place. Between the school system, the proximity to other destinations, safety, and the overall community feel, these youth felt that Marlboro would be a place where they would want to start their own family. From my perspective, Marlboro did provide me with experiences in which I could grow both physically and socially. While some people told me otherwise, all of my friends and their families were very supportive in my well-being and genuinely cared for one another. How I developed these relationships with my peers and how I came to truly enjoy living in Marlboro was because of my involvement in the community through sports and recreational activities.

My parents were never the kind of people to force their leisure activities on my brother and I. They thought it was useless to impose such practices on their sons, as there was no point if they were not going to enjoy what they were doing (Self-Interview, 2017). Leisure activities, whether physical activities like sports, or non-physical activities like cards and board games, are for pure enjoyment purposes (Hurd, 2011), and my parents took that definition whole heartedly. My parents were always very supportive of the activities and sports that I wanted to do, as they knew that I enjoyed participating in them. When talking with my friends about their experiences

with their parent's involvement in their recreational experiences, they had the same if not similar. From a consensus on the friends that I talked to, their parents encouraged them to do activities they wanted to do as well. I felt that there was a specific expectation with youth in Marlboro when regarding outside activities, particularly physical activities and sports. If a youth wanted to participate in an activity or a sport, there was the expectation that this would actually happen. They did not have or were not worried about other factors such as time, money, resources, or other factors that could impede a youth from participation in these activities. Looking back and reflecting on my youth recreation experiences, I see that this was the case for me as well. While my parents never forced these activities on me, I always expected that if I wanted to play, I was going to play. I was fortunate enough to have parents that could afford for both my brother and myself to participate in recreational and physical activities throughout our childhood. While my parents gave me the opportunity to engage in these recreational activities both organized and unorganized, the town itself played a major role as well.

Since the town is a suburb, Marlboro is an area that has a great amount of space. Through my research, I have seen how much the town has grown over the past thirty to forty years, in addition to watching the town grow during my childhood. Marlboro has parts to the area that are built up with different restaurants, stores, and other businesses. However, the town also has massive amounts of land that is untouched, this has potential other opportunities for physical activity and recreational activities. From my review, I found that most people I interviewed were fortunate enough to engage in physical activities outside of the recreation department. They seemed to have the necessary equipment and space to play "pick-up" games. From driving around the town of Marlboro, most people have space in their backyard for outdoor physical activity, as the residents who live there definitely take advantage of that. In my experiences,

everyone in my neighborhood had space in their backyard to engage in physical activity and recreation, but usually the families used these spaces for other purposes. Almost every house on my block has some sort of patio or pool in the backyard, limiting their space for physical activities that required a great deal of land. My backyard, however, was not occupied by any of these, and had the space to engage in a wide variety of physical activities. As a child, I remember playing countless games of backyard sports such as Ultimate Frisbee and Whiffle Ball. Due to the limited space in some people's backyards, they would move to streets in our neighborhood to play other games. Most notably was what my friends who lived in the neighborhood called "Cold-a-Sac Baseball," a group of ten to fifteen year old boys pretending to be Derek Jeter or Ken Griffey Jr. In another interview, a friend who lived in a townhouse with limited backyard space would go to the local woods with his friends to play football (Self-Interview, 2017). Henceforth, from my own experiences and through the experiences of others, Marlboro is an area where people can find space to play, since a majority of the people already have the necessary resources to engage in different physical and recreational activities and sports.

On the other side of the spectrum, the recreation department has many spaces for recreation and physical activities. With the abundance of parks in the area, the recreation department uses these spaces to their full advantage for the variety of youth activities they provide. During my adolescent years, my Friday afternoons, Saturdays, and even Sundays were spent with friends at town the recreational center. The facility was conducive to any activity we wanted to play. There was outdoor basketball courts, soccer fields, a roller hockey rink, and a baseball field, we were always able to participate in different activities whenever we want. During recreation department organized activities, we would go to these spaces to participate in different sports. The recreation department also partnered with the local schools in the area, so

we were able to use their gymnasium facilities during recreational basketball camps and leagues. All the facilities that were owned or partially owned by the Marlboro Recreation Department were always well maintained and managed. The janitors, groundskeepers, and other maintenance staff made sure that the facilities were in peak condition for community usage. The facilities that the recreation department provided us during our youth enhanced our level of physical activity. Since the recreation department had the necessary resources to allow us to participate in physical and recreational activities, I felt more motivated to become engaged in the community as well as the activities that were organized by the department. The successful maintenance and access of the facilities allowed us to have meaningful experiences in the recreation department through the different activities they offered.

During my interview with Ted Durnst, he stressed that the programs that were run by the Marlboro Recreation Department strive to promote an un-biased atmosphere that is accepting of all people (Durnst, Personal Interview, From my participations in the recreational programs, I saw this to be true, as any individual who wanted to play could play. With sports in particular, I felt that the recreation department provided enough support to all of the participants in the program, both players, coaches, and spectators. As a former player of many different recreational sports leagues, I felt that my experiences in participating in these opportunities were very positive. Not only did I learn many different skills required for success in these sports, but I was able to grow in other areas of my health. In Hawaiian culture, the *Lohaki Wheel* is a symbol of balance in a person's life, connecting with all aspects of their physical and spiritual world (Tellehojan, 2013). Lohaki means harmony and balance, which my participation in these programs provided me with that balance. Not only did my participation in these programs help me grow physically through learning and developing skills, but I was able to grow in other areas

as well. Through programs at the recreation department, I grew socially, as I was able to engage in activities that I enjoyed on a weekly basis with my friends. I met many different people participating in these recreational experiences. My mental and emotional health was also positively impacted by my participation in these activities. Participating in these activities allowed me to distress from the outside world and simply focus on participation in the activity. I felt fully balanced when I was participating in recreational activities, as I was able to distinguish work (school) from play. The Marlboro Recreation department provided me with the experiences to enjoy myself and fully participate in all of the activities during my youth.

From my experiences participating in the recreation programs, they provided an experience that instilled some of the values and beliefs I have today. I will admit, some of these qualities are not the best, however they define who I am as a person. The recreation department created activities the way that the youth participating in the league wanted to be run. Most everyone in my age bracket was competitive, so the recreation department provided competitive sports experiences for all of us during our youth. The competitive nature of these programs allowed me to realize the values of hard-work and dedication, values that have carried me throughout all of my life. There were many challenges that not only I faced, but my peers and teammates faced during participation in certain sport programs, so I had to overcome these challenges to be successful in my feats. The recreation department also gave me the passion I have for physical activity, sport and recreation. I thoroughly enjoy staying active and participating in as many physical activities as possible, and am excited about the thrill of competition. Through participating in youth recreation programs, I was able to meet people that had a major impact on my life and are still with me to this very day. All of these different experiences have contributed to who I am as a person.

Growing up in Marlboro has taught me many lessons in my life. I have realized how fortunate I am to have had the experience to grow up in a safe, nurturing town with many opportunities to engage in activities that I enjoy. The Marlboro Recreation Department has played a major role in many of those experiences, as I can truly say that I have become a better person because of their programs. Through my interviews with other people, I have seen that others have realized the same benefits, as they too have also had positive experiences growing up in Marlboro and positive recreational experiences. Not only is recreation and physical activity accessible to the community, but people take advantage of the opportunity to get their children involved in youth recreation. The department does a sufficient job in making sure that everyone who wants to participate can in fact participate. Overall, I am proud and grateful to have been part of such a great community through recreation and look forward to see where the program goes in the future.

## **Part VI: Comparing and Contrasting the Communities and Experiences**

Reflecting on my personal experiences, as well as the information and experiences of other people in both recreation departments, I have been able to notice similarities and differences between the communities and experiences. When looking at all of the different aspects that comprise a recreation department and the community in which they serve, one is able to analyze to see if the recreation department is accommodating the needs of the community. I also looked for consistency when I analyzed the experiences with the information received from the recreation departments, seeing if they were similar or different.

First, let's compare the two communities as a whole. The most notable difference between the two communities is that Marlboro is a suburban community while Freehold Borough is an inner-city. As mentioned earlier in the essay, a suburban community is an area defined by a population less than 1,000 people per square mile (United States Census Bureau, 2016). An urban environment has a population greater than 1,000 people per square mile (United States Census Bureau, 2016). Marlboro has a higher population than Freehold Borough, as the community has much more space to hold a larger quantity of people. However, Freehold Borough has a greater population density as compared to Marlboro, therefore categorizing the area as an urban environment. The majority of the people who live in Marlboro have white collar occupations in finance and business, as compared to people in Freehold Borough who primarily have blue collar occupations such as maintenance and food service. The occupation status of the people who live in these towns effect the socio-economic status of the area. In Freehold Borough, more individuals and their families are below the poverty line as compared to Marlboro. Property taxes are higher in Marlboro due to the size and the socioeconomic status of the community. With that, the majority of the people that live in both towns do have families.



Both the towns had different pasts, as Marlboro was a farming community and Freehold Borough was an industrial community. However, both communities have strayed away from the old lifestyle and have built up to fit the needs of the community. This building phase included town restructuring in which the recreation department plays a major role. Looking at the two recreation programs in general, some differences are noticeable from the start. Marlboro has a much larger recreation department than that of Freehold Borough, mainly due to the fact that Marlboro is a much larger community. Freehold Borough is a small, inner-city, therefore not having as high of a population as compared to a large suburb such as Marlboro. Due to the fact that Marlboro has a larger recreation department, they have more people to delegate responsibilities to different programs, with regards to youth recreation, as well as needs in the department. As the Director of the Marlboro Recreation department Ted Durnst describes, while the town has one recreation department, there are different committees that help with the programming for the community. One of these committees is for youth recreation, including the physical activity programs. Freehold Borough does not have, nor need, a large recreation department like Marlboro due to the community size. While the Recreation Department of Freehold Borough does play a major role in the community, the community YMCA has the largest role in youth recreation for physical activity in Freehold Borough. The YMCA of Freehold Borough seems to be responsible for youth physical activity programs. Director of the Freehold Borough YMCA Mel O'Neal stated in his interview that while the YMCA does most of the programming, the Recreation Department of Freehold Borough does play a major role in the success of the programs.

When looking at the recreation departments of both Marlboro and Freehold Borough, I noticed that both are crucial and are of value to the communities in which they serve. Examining

their roles from a youth physical activity lens, people in the community rely on the recreation department to provide quality recreational and physical activity experiences for their children. Both of the recreation departments organize youth programs for physical activity that allow children to be active in their community and have a quality recreational experience. Each department has values in which they try to instill in their youth through participation in these physical activity and sport programs. Despite the differences in structure and organization of the recreation departments, their mission and goals are relatively the same.

Due to the characteristics and their area classifications, Marlboro does have more land, therefore having more public parks and facilities for recreation and physical activity. Freehold Borough only has about three public recreation areas compared to Marlboro which has thirteen. In these public parks, Marlboro seems to have greater diversity for activities offered in these parks. Marlboro has aquatic facilities and parks that contain a variety of spaces of play such as basketball courts, baseball/softball fields, soccer fields, and more. Freehold Borough does not have as much of these spaces of play as compared to Marlboro. With regards to indoor facilities, Marlboro also has more spaces for these as well. The Marlboro Recreation Department has partnerships with the public schools in which the schools allow the recreation department to use their spaces for physical activity and recreation programs. Marlboro has eight schools that are available for the recreation department to use for their programs. Freehold Borough does not have that luxury, as they do not have as many indoor facilities for recreation department to use. The YMCA in Freehold Borough provides an indoor space for youth physical activity programs. In addition, the Freehold Borough YMCA partners with the YMCA of Western Monmouth County, located in the Township of Freehold, for youth to participate in some programs there and use indoor facilities, including an aquatic facility. With regards to Freehold Borough, the

YMCA and the town recreation department does partner with two local schools to use their facilities for youth physical activity and recreation programs. With both communities having spaces and programs for community members to use and participate, respectively, some conflicts of interest arise with regards to access.

After analyzing my research, interviews, and experiences, the facilities and programs offered by both recreation departments seem to be very accessible to the people in the community. However, each community has some resistance to this aspect of community recreation and physical activity. In Marlboro, all of the public parks and facilities are open to the public and the community. While most of the facilities are free, some facilities require a fee in which one pays to use the space for a specific amount of time. However, the general public cannot use the facilities when an individual or group of people has a permit to use the field. From personal experience as well as from the experiences of other people in Marlboro, this has effected individual's opportunities to use the spaces as desired. According to Durnst, the use of permits does not generally effect people from using the facilities, however in some cases, it does. All Marlboro residents are eligible for their youth to participate in community physical activity and recreation programs. Durnst strives to make sure that any child who wants to participate in a specific program has the opportunity to participate. Freehold Borough allows all residents to use the facilities and participate in the programs available. As mentioned before, the YMCA in Freehold Borough is free for all residents to use and enjoy. Similar to Durnst, Mel O'Neal stated in his interview that he believes the YMCA provides opportunities for youth to engage themselves. However, based on the experiences from my interview with T, he claimed that space was limited for some of the youth programs, as friends of his would occasionally get locked out. I find that this issue could be common in a small community such as Freehold Borough, due to

the amount of space available. Many factors could have played a role into T's scenario, although from speaking with other community members in Freehold Borough, this does not seem to be an issue.

As mentioned earlier in the research, the socioeconomic statuses of Marlboro and Freehold Borough differ greatly. Families in Marlboro have higher paying jobs than families in Freehold Borough due to their occupation status. However, for both communities, socioeconomic status does not seem to be an issue for both recreation departments and the people involved in the programs. Both of the recreation departments in Marlboro and Freehold Borough are committed to making sure families can provide quality recreational experiences for their child. Most of the programs that are organized by the Freehold Borough department of recreation require a small fee or are free for community members. This allows for increased participation for the amount of space available, according to O'Neal. The Recreation Department of Freehold Borough provides adequate funds so families can allow their children to participate in these programs. T recalled that most youth that wanted to participate in physical activity programs were not limited because of financial means. In Marlboro, Durnst stated that finances are not an issue as well. Most families can afford their children to participate in the physical activity programs available. Both the Marlboro and the Freehold Borough Recreation Departments have scholarships and grants available to help families in need of financial assistance. Despite the differences in socioeconomic status, funding does not seem to be a major concern due to the dedication and support from recreation departments and the communities.

Both Marlboro and Freehold Borough are culturally diverse communities. However, Freehold Borough does have more of a minority population as compared to Marlboro. In Freehold Borough, the majority of residents living in the community are Hispanic and Latino, as

compared to Marlboro where most of residents living there are White. Marlboro and Freehold Borough are working to adapt to the cultural needs of the community through communication with the community and addressing their needs. With the mindset of providing a quality recreation experience for the people of the community, including their children, both recreation departments want to design programs and activities that are culturally relevant to the people that live in the community. For both communities, this initiative is still a work in progress, however both communities are taking the necessary steps to fit the needs of the community.

When looking at the physical activity and recreation experiences of myself and T, they truly are one in the same. Both of us lived very active lives as youth in our respective communities through the continued support of the towns' recreation departments. Both of us were eager to get involved in our communities, as well as be physically active throughout our childhood. Both myself and T recalled of positive experiences with regards to participating in physical activity in our respective towns. The areas in which we lived provided us with opportunities to be active in organized and unorganized physical activity. Our physical activity experiences in our communities contributed to our physical and social development throughout our childhood and have turned us into the people we are today. While I currently may be a little more physically active than T is now, both of us look back on our recreation and physical activity experiences and are truly thankful to have been involved in these organizations and lived in our communities.

**Part VII: Discussion/Conclusion**

Even though seven miles of one New Jersey State Highway separate the towns of Marlboro and Freehold Borough, the community contexts seem even farther apart. Marlboro is a middle to high class suburban community with vast, open spaces of land for recreation and physical activity. Freehold Borough is a small, low to middle class community with limited space for recreation and physical activity due to the amount of infrastructure there. Looking at the communities on paper from a recreation standpoint, one might assume that Marlboro would provide more opportunities for youth physical activity and recreation due to the resources and space available. However, through my research, I have come to find that both of these aspects were not an issue for Freehold Borough, as they are still able to provide quality experiences for youth physical activity and recreation.

Both communities are able to provide programs for the youth in their communities in which they would enjoy. Resources seem not to be an issue for either communities, as both are able to provide the necessary resources for their youth physical activity programs to be successful. Looking at the community of Freehold Borough as compared to Marlboro, one may wonder how a community of that size and low socio-economic status may be able to obtain resources for their programs. Through donations as well as scholarships and grants from other outside communities or sources, the Freehold Borough Recreation Department has been able to support the programs by providing resources such as equipment, staff, and maintenance of the facilities. The community of Freehold Borough has also helped in this effort, donating time and sometimes money, to ensure that youth and other youth have the opportunity to stay active and participate in physical activity programs. The context of the community does not prevent the

recreation department and the YMCA of Freehold Borough to create physical activity programs that promote youth development

Through immersing myself in my own community of Marlboro as well as the community of Freehold Borough, I have come to learn that the recreation departments of both communities take youth recreation very seriously. They look to provide positive experiences for youth recreation and encourage children to be active throughout childhood and the rest of their lives. The staff at these recreation programs look to foster youth development not only for their physical growth, but their social growth as well. Both the recreation departments of Marlboro and Freehold Borough strive to adapt to the needs of the community regarding youth recreation. They are always creating and brainstorming new programs in which youth in the communities would enjoy. This means adapting to the cultural needs of the communities as well, looking at the different ethnic backgrounds of the people that live there, and creating programs that fit those needs. Generally, the facilities and programs of both recreation departments are accessible to community members to use on a daily basis. Overall, all of these aspects are properly maintained and taken into consideration for both recreation departments. These aspects contribute to the department's success in creating youth physical activity programs that are effective and provide youth with opportunities to be physically active in their own community.

At the beginning of this study two years ago, I had pre-conceived notions about the results I would find. I thought that because the community of Freehold Borough was smaller and had a low socio-economic status, that the community recreation department would struggle with providing adequate programs to their community members. Although, from completing my research and analysis of these different communities, I have been able to realize that resources and space are not factors for youth physical activity and recreation. Despite the space and

amount of resources, both communities provide adequate opportunities for youth to be physically active in the community. In both Marlboro and Freehold Borough, youth can participate in organized and un-organized physical activity. This is mainly due to the commitment of the staff who work in the recreation departments of both communities. Through personal experience and the experiences of other people in both communities, youth have had and continue to have positive recreational experiences in physical activity. I have come to conclude that space, resources, and funding do not seem to be an issue for communities who have low socio-economic status. If the community is dedicated in providing youth with opportunities to be physically active, the recreation departments can achieve that goal with help from the community. As evident with both the Marlboro and the Freehold Borough recreation departments, scholarships and grants are available for communities that need assistance for funding their programs. If the recreation department of any community can show the same amount of support and care to the members as the communities in the study, they will be successful in organizing and maintaining effective physical activity and recreation programs that foster youth development. By creating positive experiences in physical activity for youth, these experiences can have a major impact on their child for the rest of their life.



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